

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT

# A FEMINIST ENERGY AND CLIMATE POLICY FOR GREECE AND CYPRUS

Less Demand, More Access and Better Governance

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Greece and Cyprus have a poor environmental track record, with a lack of public participation in energy and climate policymaking.



Energy communities present a unique opportunity to boost citizen participation in the energy transition, while ensuring that vulnerable groups are not excluded.



Public EU funds, including the Just Transition and the Social Climate Fund, should be leveraged to support climate initiatives that integrate social justice perspectives.



To achieve a feminist climate policy more research is needed that fully takes gender disaggregated data into consideration.



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## 1

# INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Mediterranean is especially susceptible to climate change because of a combination of geographical, ecological and socio-economic factors. In parallel with this, the region is experiencing increased levels of conflict and militarisation, as a result of which funding and political attention may be diverted from the climate transition. In a region already experiencing severe impacts from climate change, some are more seriously impacted by climate change than others. The ecological crisis is worsening existing inequalities, as vulnerable groups – such as those marginalised by gender, age, income or race – bear the brunt of these effects. Additionally, some people face intersectional discrimination as they belong to multiple marginalised groups, compounding their vulnerability and exacerbating the disproportionate impact of the ecological crisis on their lives.

Feminist climate policy integrates gender equality into climate action and environmental policies. It recognises that climate change disproportionately affects women and marginalised communities, often exacerbating existing inequalities,<sup>1</sup> and questions existing power structures. By taking into account the different experiences and needs of women and other disadvantaged groups, feminist climate policy promotes a more inclusive and fairer society. It strives not only to protect the environment, but also to ensure a fair distribution of resources and access to opportunities and to fight against discrimination. In this way, a sustainable and just climate policy is achieved that promotes social justice instead of deepening existing inequalities. A feminist approach is at the core of FES climate justice projects, which focus on addressing both environmental and social injustices in an integrated way.

While a lack of attention to gender has been noted in global climate policymaking, in recent years both researchers and international organisations have recognised the need to base climate policy on gender analysis and integrate equality objectives. At the European level, with the European Green Deal Member States are committed to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This goal is enshrined in legislation with the EU climate law. At the same time the Commission has committed to including an equality perspective in all EU policy

areas to promote a »Union of Equality«.<sup>2</sup> The European Green Deal, one of whose aims is to ensure that »no person and no place is left behind«, is rightly emphasising a just transition for everyone. But while it acknowledges the importance of the social dimension in some areas of the green transition, it neglects gender and intersectional inequalities in others (Heffernan et al. 2021).

Some countries are already implementing promising measures in line with a feminist approach. For example, Spain's climate law has a strong focus on the social dimension of climate policy and particularly the gendered realities of climate change.<sup>3</sup>

The energy sector plays a crucial role in both driving climate change and exacerbating vulnerability in the Mediterranean region. At the same time, the energy transition risks reinforcing existing power inequalities if social and governance aspects are not addressed. This is why in this policy brief the focus will be on the energy sector.

In this policy brief we will assess the current state of the feminist dimension with regard to the energy transition in Greece and Cyprus and outline a vision of how a feminist climate policy could be implemented in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Feminist Climate Policy; available at: <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/195072/bmz-factsheet-feministische-klimapolitik-en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Gender Equality Strategy; available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_en#gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en#gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025)

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://justclimate.fes.de/e/gender-mainstreaming-in-energy-policies-the-spanish-example.html>

## 2

## THE CASE OF GREECE

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Greece's overall performance in terms of its climate and energy policies remains mixed, at best. With regard to *biodiversity protection* it severely lags behind. In fact, a new report<sup>4</sup> highlights that out of 174 NATURA2000 sea areas in Greece, only 12 are under some sort of protection scheme. This effectively means that only 3.4 per cent of Greek sea areas are protected, when the country has pledged to protect 30 per cent by 2030. The country's general lack of effective protection within NATURA areas (even oil and gas drilling are allowed at the core sites of protected areas) has prompted the Commission to take legal action.

Greece's low recycling rates, as well as the lack of effective reusability and circularity policies for industry, place the country at the bottom of the EU in terms of *circularity rates*<sup>5</sup>, understood here as »the share of used material resources which came from recycled waste materials«.

Evidently, the implementation of key Fitfor55<sup>6</sup> and EU Green Deal files is lagging behind in Greece, with one notable exception, namely the level of renewable energy sources in the country's electricity mix. In 2023, 57 per cent of electricity came from renewables, which in turn led to the structural decline of coal, as the fuel's associated emissions declined by 85.8 per cent from 2005 to 2023. However, the country's spatial plan for renewable energy sources has not been updated since 2009, leading to an outdated strategy that has led to various conflicts between renewable energy project developers and local communities. The situation has prompted experts to call for a holistic zoning approach that takes into account biodiversity protection and the inclusion of local communities in the planning process.<sup>7</sup> The country's updated spatial plan for renewable energy is expected in early 2025.

Furthermore, following a decade of deep austerity cuts and a generalised financial crisis, Greece consistently ranks as one of the countries most affected by energy poverty, with over 30 per cent of its population categorised as energy-poor.<sup>8</sup> The recast EU Energy Efficiency Directive provides an overarching definition of the phenomenon: broadly speaking, it is a lack of access to essential energy services, such as heating and cooling, and lighting.<sup>9</sup> Many structural factors contribute to this phenomenon, including badly insulated and old building stock, rapidly changing climatic conditions with no effective adaptation plans, especially for cities, where the majority of the population lives, and a completely liberalised energy market with low penetration rates of price control mechanisms, such as self-consumption and power purchase agreements.

While energy poverty affects all segments of society, the burden is felt especially by groups that are already facing structural disadvantages, such as houseless people, people of refugee and/or migrant status, and LGBTQI people. These groups experience energy poverty in ways that are compounded by the intersections of multiple forms of marginalisation, such as race, gender, immigration status and socioeconomic position, which can further limit their access to resources and increase their vulnerability to its impacts. Women are also disproportionately affected by the phenomenon (Zografia 2024) and especially single mother households, as sharp gendered divisions in Greek society mean that they often assume the role of care-takers.

All in all, there is much room for improvement regarding the state of play of the climate and energy transition in Greece. From citizen science groups to climate assemblies and energy communities, a feminist approach to the climate transition calls for greater participation and co-ownership of citizens. Such a holistic approach can ensure citizen buy-in, the build up of social capital and cohesion, and ultimately broad acceptance of the energy and climate transition.

4 Η ΔΙΑΧΕΙΡΙΣΗ ΤΩΝ ΘΑΛΑΣΣΙΩΝ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΤΕΥΟΜΕΝΩΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΧΩΝ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ (Management of marine zones under protection in Greece); available at: <https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/mpas.pdf>

5 EU's circular material use rate rose slightly in 2022. Eurostat; available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20231114-2>

6 European Commission, Fitfor55; available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fit-for-55/>

7 How many renewable energy projects do we want and where? Towards a more just and nature friendly energy transition. EnergyPress; available at: <https://energypress.gr/news/telika-poses-ape-theloyme-kai-poy-pros-mia-dikaii-kai-filiki-pros-ti-fysi-energeiaki-metabasi>

8 Joint Research Centre, »Who's energy poor in the EU? It's more complex than it seems«; available at: [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/whos-energy-poor-eu-its-more-complex-it-seems-2024-09-25\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/whos-energy-poor-eu-its-more-complex-it-seems-2024-09-25_en)

9 European Commission, Recast Energy Efficiency Directive; available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32023L1791>

## A FEMINIST APPROACH TO ENERGY

### Introducing energy communities

Within the scope of feminist climate and energy policy understood as a set of emancipatory approaches that expand peoples' access to essential services, energy communities are a key tool. They first appeared in EU legislation with the 2018 Clean Energy for all Europeans Package of Directives,<sup>10</sup> and specifically in Greek legislation with Law 4513/2018, which was subsequently complemented with Law 5037/2023.<sup>11</sup> Effectively, energy communities are cooperatives that allow citizens, local authorities, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and other private entities to engage in collective investments in renewable energy projects. In Greece, the dominant model for energy communities has been the creation of solar parks (to sell or self-consume energy). Greece counts over 1,700 such registered communities. It's important to note that this number does not fully reflect reality, as many of these communities are either inactive or defunct. The latest figures on total project installations are promising, however, with energy communities commanding over 1.318 MW of total installed project capacity.

Energy communities can offer structural and empowering solutions to accelerate the energy transition, while breaking cycles of energy poverty and fossil fuel dependency. Under a typical participatory approach, a household would make a one-off contribution to secure their share in a collective solar park, ultimately obtaining access to cheap, renewable and local energy for the next 25 years. At a time of broad economic stagnation, especially for working class people, this upfront capital might be out of reach. This is why energy communities develop mechanisms to subsidise the participation of vulnerable households in their projects, as analysed below. Numerous good practices on the part of energy communities already exist in almost every region in Greece,<sup>12</sup> while in 2024 »Desmi« was officially established, a federative body for energy communities, working towards energy democratisation.

Across Europe energy communities are taking steps to ensure greater inclusivity and a feminist lens for the energy transition.<sup>13</sup> From simple actions, such as using inclusive language or scheduling general assemblies at times that are more suitable for parents, to more structural measures, such as dedicated Gender Action Plans, energy communities are pioneering various feminist approaches. These Action Plans in turn outline multi-year strategies for energy communities to achieve gender equality, including by achieving gender parity in their boards, fostering a safe working environment free

from harassment and with inclusive language, and creating tangible work opportunities for women engineers.

A concrete measure implemented by various communities in Greece is the hiring of child carers to allow parents, and especially women, who usually assume the main burden of caring for children in Greece, unfettered access to general assemblies, which tend to last two or three hours.

### Collaboration between energy communities and municipalities to foster social justice<sup>14</sup>

As the energy and climate transition shifts into top gear in Europe, it's important that citizens are well informed about the opportunities and challenges that arise. This is why key European Directives, including the Energy Performance of Buildings, the Energy Efficiency and the Renewable Energy Directives all foresee the creation of local and/or regional »one stop shops« (OSS). These refer to physical or online spaces whereby citizens can access key information regarding the energy transition, such as how to renovate their houses, install rooftop PV, set up or join an energy community, participate in an e-car leasing or sharing scheme, and replace old appliances with energy efficient ones.

Spain is leading the way with the setting up of such OSS through its Transformation Offices programme, often run in collaboration between local authorities and local social groups, such as anti-poverty network organisations. A prominent example is »La Palma Renovable«, which runs a local OSS on the island of La Palma, providing citizens with advice on energy efficiency and savings, and opportunities to participate in local collective self-consumption projects.<sup>15</sup> Energy communities could thus help to co-administer such local one stop shops, creating local awareness about the energy and climate transition, ensuring trust and local buy-in. This is especially important if policymakers want to engage social groups with structural disadvantages, who often »fall through the cracks« of climate and energy policy. This includes – non-exhaustively – people living in informal settlements, people of refugee and migrant status, disabled people, and previously incarcerated individuals. Additionally, local authorities could create dedicated vocational training programmes particularly geared towards women, or any of the aforementioned groups, to encourage higher engagement in green jobs, such as in the renewable energy sector.

With the joint goal of promoting an inclusive, local energy and climate transition, energy communities are a natural fit with municipalities in other ways, too:

<sup>10</sup> Recast Directive 2018/2001 (Renewable Energy Directive II, or REDII) and recast Directive 2019/944 (the Internal Electricity Market Directive, or IEMD), which legally established CECs (Citizens Energy Communities) and RECs (Renewable Energy Communities) as the two legal definitions covering energy communities.

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.kodiko.gr/nomothesia/document/872080/nomos-5037-2023>

<sup>12</sup> <https://desmi.info/en/meli/>

<sup>13</sup> Various examples are documented in REScoop.eu's Inclusivity Guide. Available at: [https://www.sccale203050.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Inclusivity-Guidebook\\_SCCALE203050\\_updated.pdf](https://www.sccale203050.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Inclusivity-Guidebook_SCCALE203050_updated.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> The outcomes included in the sub-chapter are findings identified within the framework of the European project LIFE LOOP, "Local Ownership of Power," which has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under grant agreement No 101077085.

<sup>15</sup> <https://lapalmarenovable.es/en/>

- **Addressing energy poverty:** By law, energy communities are required to produce social benefits for the local community. One of the primary activities they can develop is to support vulnerable consumers and address energy poverty among those living below the poverty threshold, regardless of their membership status within the community. Municipalities, as the closest local authority to citizens, naturally address social issues, including energy poverty. They can partner with energy communities to identify and support energy-poor households by including them, free of charge, in community energy projects or by offering low cost shares in these community energy projects. This approach was applied successfully to the Minoan Energy Community in Crete: the Regional Authority purchased shares to cover the energy consumption of over 100 local households affected by the earthquake in September 2021. Moreover, energy communities in Ioannina and Athens<sup>16</sup> have collaborated with their local municipalities to establish fair and transparent procedures for identifying energy-vulnerable households, who then receive free energy from local community energy projects. In all cases, the energy communities went beyond standard financial criteria, focusing on social criteria, such as prioritising single-parent households or people of refugee backgrounds. Municipalities used these criteria to choose the households eligible for support. By taking into account vulnerable social groups' unique needs, energy communities partner up with local municipalities to offer a feminist approach to the energy transition that leaves no one behind.
- **Shared goals:** Local authorities often have specific climate and energy goals in their Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs). Energy communities can contribute directly to achieving these goals by producing clean energy locally, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and decreasing dependence on fossil fuels. They can also support their local municipalities in developing their own community projects, or join forces and co-invest in community energy projects, thereby fast-tracking processes and utilising public assets at the same time.
- **Community building, social cohesion and social acceptance of renewable energy projects:** Energy communities promote active participation, democratic dialogue and close collaboration among the local citizens, fostering a shared purpose for their local community. Municipalities can benefit from these schemes and »platforms«, which enhance social cohesion and increase the social acceptance of the local energy transition. By collaborating with local energy communities, municipalities can strengthen citizen engagement and build a trustworthy relationship with their local communities. While certain marginalised

communities, for example, people living in informal settlements, might fall through the cracks of national climate and energy programmes, energy communities can adopt a more granular, community-based approach. In partnership with local municipal social services they can adopt a wider, more holistic approach to defining vulnerability, and thus identify and reach out to otherwise »invisible« segments of society.

### The building sector as a starting point for a feminist approach

Envisioning a sustainable future in the building sector through a feminist lens challenges us to go beyond efficiency metrics and consider the deeply human, social dimensions of energy use and building design. Buildings are not just structures; they are spaces in which lives unfold, and a feminist framework recognises that sustainability depends on understanding who inhabits these spaces, how they are used and to what end.

A feminist approach to energy efficiency in buildings centres on equity and inclusivity, addressing people's different needs, responsibilities and vulnerabilities based on gender and socio-economic status. Women, for example, are disproportionately affected by energy poverty (Feenstra 2024), as they often manage household energy use on lower or fixed incomes. Addressing this through targeted retrofitting, safeguards against rent hikes, and affordable upgrades would directly improve comfort and economic stability for those most impacted.

Women also face limited opportunities in the building and energy sectors,<sup>17</sup> where they are underrepresented in roles that shape policies, designs and technical decisions. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle in which women's insights and needs, such as caregiving, household management and safety, are often overlooked. Without equitable access to career opportunities, women are more vulnerable to the challenges of energy poverty, and unable to afford energy-efficient upgrades or appliances. A feminist approach aims to dismantle these barriers through inclusive training, equitable hiring and policies that empower women to actively shape the future of the built environment.

This framework also calls for a rethinking of urban planning and building design, in which traditionally male-dominated perspectives have often neglected the needs of caregivers, families and community-centred activities. A feminist approach promotes accessibility and communal spaces that support shared caregiving roles and community resilience. Buildings should not only consume less energy but also provide spaces that meet the diverse needs of their inhabitants.

Moreover, a feminist approach to sustainability calls for greater representation of women and marginalised groups in decision-making, from design and engineering to policymaking and project management. The latest data available for Greece

<sup>16</sup> The Municipality of Athens has founded a dedicated OSS-like office to help tackle energy poverty. One of the measures it offers citizens is participation in energy communities. The Municipality is also planning to co-develop such communities together with citizens to help them own the transition; available at: <https://gaef.developathens.gr/>

<sup>17</sup> International Energy Agency, A critical issue in energy employment and access; available at: <https://www.iea.org/topics/energy-and-gender>

(2022) shows that only one out of five people working in the energy sector and only 22 per cent of decision-makers on the environment and climate change were women.<sup>18</sup> Including these voices is not only fair but also leads to more diverse, effective solutions. When policies and plans reflect the experiences of those directly affected by energy decisions, they are more likely to achieve lasting success.

In this vision, the principles of energy efficiency, affordability and sustainability are intertwined with justice, inclusion and care. A feminist approach to sustainable buildings aims not only to lower carbon footprints but also to foster environments in which everyone can live with dignity and security. Addressing affordability, accessibility and community-oriented design ensures that the Green Deal is both a path to environmental stewardship and a platform for building more equitable societies.

Zooming in on the policy landscape, EU Member States are currently drafting their National Building Renovation Plans (NBRPs), as mandated by the EU's Revised Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. These long-term strategies, to be put into effect from 2027 onwards, will outline a long-term vision concerning how to make countries' building stocks energy efficient and broadly fit for the climate transition. NBRPs are supposed to outline strategies to target the worst performing buildings, while also setting forth measures to ensure that vulnerable citizens are the first to access tools, information and financing to renovate their homes.

Concurrently, another key development in this sector is the extension of the Emissions Trading System (ETS) into the buildings and transport sectors. In effect the »ETS2« system will impose a levy on the use of fossil fuels in these sectors as a market-based mechanism to incentivise their decarbonisation. While the EU as a whole, and Greece in particular, have noted flatlining or even rising emissions in the buildings and transport sectors, indicating that more aggressive climate policies are required, the price increases under ETS2 will inadvertently burden the most economically vulnerable, namely those who cannot afford to switch their gas boilers to heat pumps, or their petrol-driven cars to electric vehicles. The Social Climate Fund was established to counteract some of the regressive effects of ETS2.<sup>19</sup> Approximately 86 billion euros will be mobilised at the EU level for Member States to invest specifically in energy efficiency, clean heating and cooling and transport solutions, as well as housing renovations. To access this Fund Member States must draft National Social Climate Plans (NSCPs).

A feminist approach to tackling energy poverty means that all citizens' voices must be heard, especially those directly af-

ected. Therefore, any policy meant to tackle the phenomenon should be co-created with people experiencing its effects first hand. Along these lines, in drafting their NBRPs, as well as their NSCPs, a process that should happen in parallel and with significant alignment,<sup>20</sup> EU Member States should mobilise a wide array of social partners, including civil society actors and anti-poverty networks.<sup>21</sup> Greece's plan is currently under development. While the country has developed targeted policies to help vulnerable households escape energy poverty, for example, dedicated subsidies for housing renovations and a social electricity tariff, two blind spots remain in the current approach: (i) the criteria for defining vulnerability are restricted to economic considerations (for example, disposable income, share of disposable income provided to cover electricity bills), and neglect social factors (such as gender, ability, sexuality, migrant status and so on); (ii) people subject to structural vulnerabilities are often passive recipients of these benefits and policies, as opposed to getting a seat at the table to actively design them in the first place.

### **Empowering people with different backgrounds (including gender) to participate in the digital aspects of the green transition: the case of flexibility**

Innovation and technology necessarily reflect the values, biases and interests of the individuals and systems that create, design and deploy them. With the rapid advancement of so-called »artificial intelligence« technologies in recent years, this discourse has resurfaced,<sup>22</sup> highlighting the potential for discrimination and inequality if technology is not examined through political and social lenses.

An important step in the green transition is the digitalisation of the energy sector, which integrates smart metering technologies and advanced energy management systems across the grid. These technologies are being shaped by different stakeholders and at the same time they are shaping the energy future. It is therefore important to ensure just and equitable access to the design, testing and evaluation of these technologies. To achieve this, gender and diversity mainstreaming of the research and development process of energy technologies, along with adopting co-design strategies that engage a diverse array of citizens, is of paramount importance.<sup>23</sup>

The transformation of citizens from passive consumers into active participants in the energy system also requires their

<sup>18</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index; available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/country/EL#:~:text=Women%20are%20highly%20underrepresented%20in,the%20energy%20sector%20in%202022>

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, Social Climate Fund; available at: [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/social-climate-fund\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/social-climate-fund_en)

<sup>20</sup> CANE, Planning a fair and ambitious Renovation Wave; available at: <https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2024/10/30.10.24-CANE-Planning-a-fair-and-ambitious-renovation-wave.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> See: <https://www.rescoop.eu/toolbox/green-solidarity-guiding-principles-for-a-truly-just-social-climate-fund>

<sup>22</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Preventing discrimination caused by the use of artificial intelligence; available at: <https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/EGA/Pdf/TextesProvisaires/2020/20200915-PreventingDiscriminationAI-EN.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2023; available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-index-2023-towards-green-transition-transport-and-energy>



understanding of and engagement with these technologies. However, existing inequalities based on income, gender, race, nationality and disability might affect their access to relevant science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and careers. Addressing stereotypes through awareness-raising and providing skills development opportunities through educational initiatives can help to bridge this gap.

For example, demand-side flexibility programmes<sup>24</sup> are aimed at reducing energy usage during peak times by encouraging end-users to shift or shave their energy use during certain periods. However, gender bias often emerges in the design and implementation of these programmes. First, because women in general handle more household responsibilities and caregiving tasks<sup>25</sup> their schedules may be less flexible, and as a result, they may find it more difficult to adjust energy use as required by these programmes. Consequently, the burden often falls on them to carry out the necessary actions, meaning they must complete household tasks not just efficiently but also at specific times. Furthermore, without gender indicators or analysis in pilot programmes, the development of DR technologies, such as apps and targeted messaging, may fail to account for how differently energy management information might be perceived by women and men. This oversight can result in solutions that are less effective or even burdensome for women, reinforcing existing gender disparities in energy consumption and household labour (Tjørring et al. 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to implement these strategies with an awareness of gendered energy consumption patterns and to actively engage diverse stakeholders in the design and implementation processes.

## CONCLUSIONS: NEXT STEPS ON MAINSTREAMING FEMINIST APPROACHES TO CLIMATE POLICY

New EU rules on public spending are foreshadowing significant public cuts in social and environmental investments.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, research suggests that the EU needs an annual increase of at least 260 billion euros in public investments to meet its climate obligations alone.<sup>27</sup> In this difficult political environment, in which multiple high-level priorities are vying for attention, it's worth considering which policies can be both climate- and socially just. For example, public subsidies to support electric private vehicles could be considered less socially useful than subsidies for electric *public* transport, such as rail or buses. A similar parallel could be drawn for energy communities versus private renewable projects. As Greece is currently planning important policy documents,

such as its National Social Climate Plan, it should incline its public investments towards such holistic solutions, including energy communities. Additional revenue could be created by shifting all fossil fuel subsidies to solutions that tackle energy poverty at its root, including social housing and public transport. The Commission has repeatedly highlighted eliminating these subsidies in its European Semester reports for Greece.<sup>28</sup> A feminist climate policy must also resist the ongoing drive towards militarisation observed across Europe, and particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean. At a time of growing climate impacts, human displacement and a yawning gap in social and climate investments by which Europe can achieve its sustainable development agenda, progressive forces must resist another arms race. Solutions based on peacebuilding, dialogue, reconciliation and shared project development, for example, cross-border energy communities, must be enhanced.

Further research is required on the impacts of climate change, as well as climate policy, on different social groups. In designing such policies, as well as their Impact Assessments, gender disaggregated data can guide evidence-based policymaking. This is relevant for the formation of the National Social Climate Plan. Women have higher levels of unemployment in Just Transition areas of Greece (Zografia 2024). This means that women living in areas that are already structurally disadvantaged, in this case due to their past reliance on coal extraction as a main economic activity, face compounding and intersecting barriers. The Just Transition Fund should be leveraged to support female climate entrepreneurs, young people and other structurally disadvantaged groups in these areas.

Negotiations on the next EU Budget (the Multiannual Financial Framework or MFF) for 2028–2034 begin in 2025. Several civil society organisations have started coalescing around the idea of mainstreaming social dimensions, including the gender dimension, in the EU budget, and specifically in climate policies. This will be especially important in order to counteract far right voices calling for the dismantling of green policies, purportedly in the name of »social equity«. Greece should play a constructive role during negotiations with the European Commission to ensure that the next EU budget supports such mainstreaming approaches.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, while it's clearly urgent to transition to renewable energy from polluting and expensive fossil fuels, a truly feminist climate policy should first and foremost consider sufficiency-oriented policies with resource and energy demand reductions at their core.<sup>30</sup> A transition to feminist climate policy would also require a broader reconfiguration of

<sup>24</sup> Electra Energy Cooperative, DRise Demand Response – Residential Innovation for a Sustainable Energy System; available at: <https://electraenergy.coop/en/drise-en/>

<sup>25</sup> See: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/domain/time>

<sup>26</sup> New Fiscal Rules Threaten Europe's Investments in its Future. <https://www.solidar.org/news-and-statements/new-fiscal-rules-europe-investments-future/>

<sup>27</sup> Institut Rousseau, Road to Net Zero. Bridging the green investment gap; available at: <https://institut-rousseau.fr/road-2-net-zero-en/>

<sup>28</sup> European Commission, European Semester documents for Greece; available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/european-semester/european-semester-your-country/european-semester-documents-greece\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/european-semester/european-semester-your-country/european-semester-documents-greece_en)

<sup>29</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung Brussels, Advancing gender equality: What perspective for the next EU legislative cycle?; available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2024/05/21/advancing-gender-equality-what-perspective-next-eu-legislative-cycle>

<sup>30</sup> See: <https://www.rescoop.eu/news-and-events/news/a-resilient-and-resource-wise-europe-sufficiency-at-the-heart-of-the-eus-future>

social and political governance models, with a shift towards forms of more direct democracy, such as energy communities and citizens assemblies (Bell et al. 2020). Research has shown that such fora enable citizens to co-create and propose ambitious and sufficiency-oriented climate policies, while ensuring trust and social buy-in (Kuntze et al. 2021). The EU, through the Governance Regulation,<sup>31</sup> mandates that Member States set up »Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogues«, in other words multi-stakeholder fora in which climate policies are discussed and co-created. Similarly, Greece's national climate law foresees the creation of a permanent forum that would enable stakeholders to participate and provide feedback on the country's path towards climate neutrality. Neither of these things have been activated. A truly just and feminist climate and energy transition requires the active participation of citizens in decision-making, as well as their unfettered access to data and information.

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**31** A regulation that sets out common rules and provisions for the energy and climate transition in European Member States; available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TX/T/?toc=OJ%3AL%3A2018%3A328%3ATOC&uri=uriserv%3AO-J.L.\\_2018.328.01.0001.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TX/T/?toc=OJ%3AL%3A2018%3A328%3ATOC&uri=uriserv%3AO-J.L._2018.328.01.0001.01.ENG)

## 3

## THE CASE OF CYPRUS

### NATASA IOANNOU

Cyprus faces a unique combination of environmental, social and political challenges, shaped by its geographical location and ongoing political division. Located in the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus is a climate change hotspot, facing rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and threats to its biodiversity and water resources. In economic and energy terms, the country's dependence on mass tourism and fossil fuels complicates the just transition to green energy and climate neutrality. Politically, the island has been divided since 1974, with an UN-patrolled buffer zone separating the Republic of Cyprus from the Turkish-controlled north.

Women in Cyprus from all communities have been active in addressing the abovementioned challenges, playing crucial roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation, environmental and social grassroots movements. Across the island women have fostered dialogue for reconciliation, organised actions to protect natural areas, advocated for sustainable agriculture and support for women in agriculture, and of course fought for climate justice and energy justice. Cyprus has a poor record in including women in environmental and social policies, although their organised presence and action are well documented (Demetriou and Hadjipavlou 2021). An example is the exclusion of women academics, activists and researchers from high-level peace negotiations. Their contributions are often limited to behind-the-scenes roles such as preparing documents or taking notes, leaving them invisible in official processes and ignoring their contributions to peace processes across the divide (Hadjipavlou 2023).

The National Strategy on Gender Equality was approved by the Council of Ministers only in 2024. It aims at horizontal gender mainstreaming in government policies, including climate and environmental policies, within a three-year period, 2024–2026.<sup>32</sup> The Strategy mentions six recorded actions aimed at integrating gender considerations in environmental policies, only one of which specifically addresses women's involvement in the energy sector, the commissioning of a study on gender mainstreaming in energy policies.

### Climate policy in Cyprus

The National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) for Cyprus falls short of meeting its primary objectives and climate targets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing renewable energy sources, and implementing the gender aspect in the measures proposed. This is because of delays in implementing renewable energy projects, an unhealthy reliance on imported fossil fuels, and burning crude oil. By the end of 2024, the NECP for 2021–2030 will be revised to incorporate the new national targets set by the Fitfor55 package. The draft NECP plan indicates that Cyprus will fall behind on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, with a set target of 26 per cent instead of the 32 per cent Fitfor55 national targets and will barely reach targets on renewable energy. The NECP target is 33.17 per cent, in contrast to 33 per cent in the case of the Fitfor55 target.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, the NECP lacks the general framework and targeted measures to promote gender inclusion in climate mitigation measures and fails to address the specific roles and contributions of women in climate neutrality and energy transition. The lack of gender-sensitive policies not only impedes equitable participation but also limits the potential for inclusive, community-driven solutions that could foster greater public engagement in Cyprus's climate goals. This is a major gap in Cyprus because gendered injustice in national policies is likely to go hand in hand with climate injustices, such as energy poverty, lack of access to food and more exposure to the effects of climate change (Robinson et al. 2023). For instance, energy poverty in Cyprus has reached 19.3 per cent, one in five households, with women remaining at a disadvantage compared with men. In 2023, the energy poverty indicator for women was 18.1 per cent, while for men it was 15.3 per cent.

### Gender disparities in energy

In Cyprus, it is reported that women are paid 9.7 per cent less than men. This gap varies in different occupations, according to the National Statistical Service (2018), but rises to 13.6 per cent among managerial and decision-making positions.<sup>34</sup> This gap reflects not only the differences in pay for the same

<sup>32</sup> National Gender Strategy for Cyprus 2024–2026; available at: <http://bit.ly/4g73xXL>

<sup>33</sup> See <https://www.diakivernisi.gov.cy/gr/1-kybernhtiko-ergo/teli-ki-anathewrisi-toy-ethnikoy-sxedioy-gia-tin-energeia-kai-to-klima-2021-2030>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=40206#flat>

or equivalent work, but also the different opportunities for advancement and taking on leadership roles. Beyond the wage gap, there continues to be professional segregation into male-dominated and female-dominated occupations.

This serves as a barrier in the energy transition because women lag behind in decision-making positions, technicians, engineers and entrepreneurs (Komodromos 2024). Programmes focused on and designed for women are essential in breaking down barriers and inequalities in energy transition and climate policies. Actions might include capacity-building training on setting up and managing renewable energy projects, leading community energy initiatives, fundraising and accessing subsidies, and learning about energy efficiency.

### **The role of energy communities bridging the gap**

Energy communities are grassroots initiatives under the aegis of which citizens produce, consume and manage renewable energy collectively. This model not only promotes environmental sustainability, but also democratises energy production. Energy communities also align with feminist goals by challenging traditional energy structures that often exclude women. For Cypriot women, particularly in rural and underserved areas, energy communities provide an opportunity to engage in the energy sector and contribute to building local resilience against climate impacts. Energy communities enable women to assume active roles as stakeholders, which can enhance their socio-economic status and foster community cohesion (Proka 2024).

Energy communities in Cyprus are still in the early stages of development. The necessary regulatory framework remains unpublished and public awareness is still limited, which represent significant barriers to their success. Their potential for democratising energy production and reducing dependency on fossil fuels, as well as for serving as a platform for promoting gender equality, encouraging skills development and enhancing women's leadership in the renewable energy sector, may be hampered by policies that lack inclusivity measures and active participation structures.

### **A path towards gender-equitable climate action in Cyprus – policy recommendations and conclusion**

To facilitate a just energy transition in Cyprus, it is imperative to implement policies that address structural gender inequalities and actively involve women in energy governance. Equal access to training and resources must be prioritised by developing targeted programmes that provide technical education in renewable energy, financial support mechanisms and leadership development opportunities for women, particularly in rural and marginalised areas. Climate policies must also adopt a gender-responsive design, ensuring that women are meaningfully included in policymaking and implementation phases to reflect diverse societal needs and mitigate gender disparities. Promoting women-led energy communities and supporting women in setting up, organising and running energy community initiatives can address both climate and gender inequalities, creating a more resilient and

inclusive climate policy in Cyprus. Also, bicomunal energy communities in Cyprus present a transformative opportunity to foster collaboration between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot women, which could drive inclusive solutions and serve as a platform for peacebuilding.

International models show that when women are involved in community energy projects, they tend to prioritise solutions that benefit the broader community, including affordable energy prices and job creation. Examples include organisations such as Solar Sister in Africa, which has created economic opportunities for women, leading to enhanced energy access and poverty alleviation, and WEnCoop, a women-led energy cooperative in Greece that tackles energy poverty directly, benefiting women from diverse backgrounds living in vulnerable Greek communities. The creation of feminist policies focused on climate and energy justice is the only way forward for Cyprus.

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# A FEMINIST ENERGY AND CLIMATE POLICY FOR GREECE AND CYPRUS

## LESS DEMAND, MORE ACCESS AND BETTER GOVERNANCE

This publication aims to explore how a feminist climate policy approach can contribute to a more inclusive and just energy transition in Greece, Cyprus and around Europe. Both countries have a poor environmental track record with a lack of meaningful public participation in energy and climate policymaking. Feminist climate and energy policy comprises a variety of emancipatory approa-

ches that expand people's access to essential services. Energy communities represent a key tool in this context, which we discuss in this paper. Energy communities provide opportunities to boost citizen participation in the energy transition, while ensuring that social groups facing structural vulnerabilities are included. In order to achieve an energy transition that caters to everybody,

it is crucial that EU funds such as the Just Transition Fund and the Social Climate Fund are used to support climate initiatives based on a social justice perspective. In order to realise a feminist climate policy, more research is needed that takes gender disaggregated data into account. At the same time, we need direct democratic participation in climate and energy policymaking.